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What Makes People Happy?

Abstract

Happiness research determines, isolates, and measures the various determinants of human well-being. The data collected on the subjective life satisfaction of individuals are related to possible determinants of happiness by multiple regressions. The personality structure determined by one's genetic inheritance has a strong influence on happiness. Among economic factors, people with higher incomes unambiguously consider themselves to be more satisfied with their lives than do people with low income, and people losing their job are much more dissatisfied with their lives than are those holding a job. Prominent among the socio-demographic influences is a U-shaped relationship between age and life satisfaction; married people are happier than those living alone; and intensive and regular social contacts within the family and among friends and acquaintances contribute strongly to happiness. Physical and psychological health contribute strongly to well-being. Cultural differences matter, and religious persons are demonstrably happier than those who do not belong to a religious community. Happiness is positively influenced by democracy and political decentralization.

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Would you choose to be happy? Tradeoffs between happiness and the other dimensions of life in a large population survey

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- Is happiness all that people want from life.
- We trade-off happiness with income, physical health, family, career success and education.
- All types of happiness are preferred to other attributes except health.
- Affective happiness is preferred to evaluative and eudaimonic components.

Abstract

A large literature documents the determinants of happiness. But is happiness all that people want from life; and if so, what type of happiness matters to them? Or are they willing to sacrifice happiness (however it is defined) for other attributes in their lives? We show direct evidence that individuals trade-off levels of happiness with levels of income, physical health, family, career success and education in a large sample of UK and US individuals. On average, all types of happiness are preferred to other attributes except health. People prefer affective happiness (feeling good) over evaluative (life satisfaction) and eudaimonic (worthwhileness) components. This result is robust to methodological innovations, such as the use of vignettes and judgements of the lives described.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167268117301270>